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AUTHOR Goodbey, Geoffrey
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ABSTRACT

A personality and economic profile is presented of primary users of federal recreation areas. The characteristics of this outdoor recreation constituency are described and the influence of their behavior patterns and attitudes on federal land distribution policy is considered. Citing the unequal distribution of natural resources for recreational activities, suggestions are made for developing regional rather than federal recreation areas. (JD)

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Outdoor Recreation and the Federal Government: From Unequal to Equivalent

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by Geoffrey Godbey, Professor
Recreation and Parks
Penn State University

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The sponsorship of outdoor recreation opportunities by the Federal Government has emerged historically as a secondary use of lands and waters managed for other purposes such as timber, minerals, flood control and the generation of electricity. The United States Forest Service, for instance, was created in 1905 primarily to manage forest land preserved by presidential proclamation. Forest service employees soon found themselves attempting to manage recreation in order to lessen the risk of forest fires. The Multiple Use Act of 1960 recognized that such forest areas should be managed for outdoor recreation as well as range, timber, and fish and wildlife purposes.

Subsequent changes in legislation and management policies of other agencies administering Federal lands increasingly recognized the provision of recreation as a legitimate management purpose and, even in agencies where no new legislation exists, recreational usage by the public is a fact of life.

Increasingly, also, reference is made to the "Federal Outdoor Recreation System" by the Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Plan and other federal planning documents. To the extent that outdoor recreation represents a primary usage of lands which are managed as a "system," distribution of supply becomes a legitimate issue. For most other land management purposes, however, the issue of equality of distribution among the population is less encompassing since, for example, only a fraction of the population lives in twenty-year flood plains or in forested areas. Since some forms of outdoor

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recreation can take place on almost any land or water area, and since the vast bulk of people's recreation and leisure takes place in and around their homes, the ideal recreation system would appear to be one which gave equal or equivalent distribution of resources to every member of the population. The disparity between the distribution ideal based upon management for outdoor recreation purposes and the ideal for other land management purposes constitutes an inherent dilemma where land areas have multiple management objectives.

Since the Federal Government through the United States Park Service has begun establishing national outdoor recreation areas such as the Gateway National Recreation Area in New York City and others which are frankly regional in terms of service radii and are managed solely for recreation, the issue of distribution and clientele served takes on greater significance. To the extent that access to outdoor recreation resources is unequal, those who use outdoor recreation areas may constitute a unique subset of the population in regard to attitudes and behavior. From recent research, this appears to be the case.

The Outdoor Recreation Constituency. Two studies undertaken recently by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (1977) indicate clearly that: 1. There is a definite link between one's supply of outdoor recreation resources and behavior and 2. The Outdoor Recreation Constituency is not a broad cross-section of the public.

The link between behavior and supply was confirmed in many ways from the data. In terms of use of federal areas, for instance, almost half of all federal visitors live within a two-hour drive of the site they used. Over 30% of all such visitors took less than one hour to reach the federal site they used.

Additionally, multiple correlation-regression analysis generally revealed significant, positive relations between supply of parks and outdoor recreation areas at varying distances from one's home and participation.

A secondary analysis between the user survey and the general population survey using identical questions, (Brown and Godbey, 1979) revealed a high proportion of statistically significant interactive affects between demographic characteristics and participation. Generally, demographic variables showed greater variation within categories for the general public than for users of federal areas. The smaller variation in participation within a given status, such as income, among users of federal areas compared to the general public, would seem to reinforce the impact upon participation that easy access has upon such participation.

Additionally, the data suggest that users of Federal Outdoor Recreation Areas are not a broad cross-section of the public but are disproportionately young and of higher social status, not only in income but in education and occupational prestige as well. The Federal Outdoor Recreation Constituency is also disproportionately male, white, suburban and located in Midwestern and New England states and to a lesser extent Mountain and Northwestern states. Additionally, the Outdoor Recreation Constituency demonstrates, both behaviorally and attitudinally, that recreation consumption is essentially an open-ended rather than a close-ended system which conforms to what Meyersohn (1968) has called "the more, the more." This reference is to a dynamic concept of energy, suggesting that under pressure of expanding interest and motivation, the more a person does, the more he wants to do, and vice versa. Such a concept does not view energy as a fixed commodity which can be spent on either activity A or activity B. Instead, it assumes that some individuals have a higher rate of "doing" than others. Outdoor recreation participants show the relevance of this theory. Much of the

"either-or," close-ended assumptions pertaining to outdoor recreation participation are shown by the data to be incorrect. Among such incorrect "either-or" assumptions are the following:

A. People either work long hours or have high participation rates in outdoor recreation.

B. People either are currently involved in outdoor recreation activities or are likely to want to begin doing some activities.

C. People are either involved in outdoor recreation activities or are likely to have begun doing some during the last year.

D. People either participate in outdoor recreation or cite reasons preventing them from participation.

E. People either do A or B for outdoor recreation.

F. People either have outdoor recreation facilities they use near them or they desire to have them.

G. People either use outdoor recreation areas or they feel they lack information about such areas.

H. People either participate or they are likely to cite barriers to participation.

I. People either continue to use outdoor recreation areas or they feel dissatisfied with their outdoor recreation experiences on site.

J. People either have access to large national recreation areas or they believe such areas should be developed.

Based upon results from these two surveys, all the previous statements are incorrect. Instead, we find a series of "the more, the more" statements. The more a person does A for outdoor recreation, the more likely he or she is to do B. The more one uses outdoor recreation areas, the more he or she is likely to feel prevented from participating. The more likely one

is to be a spectator at outdoor sports events, the more likely he or she is also to be a participant.

This syndrome also carries over rather completely to the realm of attitudes. Thus, the most active recreation constituency is also more likely to feel unmet needs in the form of (1) personal and facility barriers to participation, including perceived shortages of their time and money as well as crowded, polluted and poorly maintained facilities; (2) increased gasoline prices making driving to recreation facilities more expensive; (3) lack of information about available recreation areas; and (4) dissatisfaction with experiences at park and outdoor recreation areas.

Impact Upon Federal Policy. From the standpoint of Federal policy, the behavioral phenomenon of "the more, the more" is unfortunate because it serves to compound or intensify the affects of an initial uneven distribution of outdoor recreation resources. That is, those with easy access to outdoor recreation supply are likely to use, desire more use, complain about barriers to participation, begin new activities and, in general, make more identifiable demands on the outdoor recreation system than those who don't have easy access to supply. While users of federal outdoor recreation areas ascribe higher levels of importance to outdoor recreation than the general public, the existence of easily accessible outdoor recreation supply may influence behavior which in turn influences attitude as easily as attitude may influence behavior which influences use of supply. The uneven distribution of outdoor recreation supply intensifies behavioral and attitudinal differences between participants and non-participants and, it may be argued, leads to policies which may create further inequities in the supply.

Users of federal recreation areas, for example, when surveyed, are much more likely than the general public to favor the Federal Government developing

a few large parks throughout the nation rather than many smaller parks closer to home. Continuing in the future to develop a few large parks, as current federal users desire, rather than many close-to-home parks, will likely further intensify the participation gap between current federal users and the rest of the public.

In conclusion, to the extent that the Federal Government establishes policies for outdoor recreation which are based upon the attitudes and activity patterns of current users of Federal Areas, further inequities will result.

A Future Strategy: Equal Or Equivalent. Given the previous findings, it would appear that equality of access to federal outdoor recreation areas is an issue which must be addressed. When one looks at the lands and waters managed by Federal agencies providing outdoor recreation opportunity, however, equality of access appears to be an unreachable and, in some cases, an irrelevant goal. Access to lakes managed by the Army Corps of Engineers can't be equitably distributed throughout the country because the lakes are a by-product of building dams, and the need for such dams varies with the geographical features of the region. Forests aren't equally distributed throughout the United States, so neither are forest service campsites. The water-based activities of the Tennessee Valley Authority aren't going to be made equally accessible to those on the west coast, nor are Bureau of Land Management Holdings going to provide the same opportunities for those on the east coast as for those in the Western states.

Furthermore, the idea of providing a uniform set of outdoor recreation areas and facilities across a highly heterogeneous society would be a giant step toward a prescriptive, mass leisure culture that would contribute to the destruction of choice in regard to leisure experience at the individual,

local and sub-cultural levels. One is reminded of Paul Goodman's charge made against the National Recreation Association (now - National Recreation and Park Association) two decades ago. Goodman (1956) charged that even if NRA had attained its goals for Americans and gotten people somehow to participate in the activities they promoted, and even if people receive personal satisfaction from such activities, that it wouldn't add up to anything. There would be no ethical necessity to it. No standard. Enjoyment, of course, is not a goal but a feeling that accompanies important on-going activity. Pleasure, as Freud said, is dependent upon function. To distribute uniform outdoor recreation resources in an equal manner throughout the United States would seem to insure that no opportunity would be provided to determine what people at the regional and local level believe to be important and culturally necessary.

Thus, it is not only impossible to make the supply of outdoor recreation resources equal, it is also not desirable. It is possible, however, to move much closer toward making such supply "equivalent," and to do so in a manner which comes closer to documenting what is considered ethically necessary by diverse users. Doing this would mean that concern would be focused upon establishing equivalent opportunity in regard to various types of outdoor recreation experiences. By equivalent it is meant that there is equality of opportunity to participate in outdoor recreation activities which are roughly speaking substitutable to the potential participant in terms of meanings and satisfactions. Hendee and Burdge (1974) define leisure activity substitutability as "the interchangeability of recreation activities in satisfying participant's motives, needs, wishes and desires."

In terms of equivalent provision of outdoor recreation, three aspects of substitutability would be considered: (1) substitution of activities; (2) substitution of modes, styles, and mileaus of participation; and (3) substitution

of public and private resources. Regarding substitution of activities, research to date, according to Hendee and Burdge is "suggestive rather than conclusive." While many questions remain, the principle would be to attempt to facilitate participation in an activity which could substitute for another in cases where the original activity could not be provided. If rock climbing and mountain climbing, for example, are found to be substitutable, government would seek to facilitate rock climbing where there were no mountains. In providing areas and facilities, government would seek to vary the style or mode of activities undertaken, whenever and however possible, to accommodate the mores and folkways of the participants. A "nature walk," for instance, will be and should be provided for differently in Newark, New Jersey than in rural Pennsylvania. In regard to the substitution of public and private outdoor recreation areas, research by Cordell (1976) indicates that "public and private recreational spaces are substituted by urban and suburban residents. As such they should no longer be considered as separate, unrelated ways to employ land." Thus, where extensive opportunity exists to camp on privately owned lands, an equivalent strategy would mean that government would not provide camping. While it might be argued that this would deprive the poor from participating, for most campers in developed areas, travel costs are the overriding financial cost. It also appears that fees charged by public and private campground operators are increasingly similar. Finally, as mentioned earlier, those who use the Federal estate are predominately middle and upper income, so the poor would stand to lose little.

In substituting between public and private provision of outdoor recreation experiences, Federal Government would serve as the "provider of last resort." That is, it would supply only when and where the private sector had not done so. Under the concept of equivalence, the overriding assumption would be that outdoor recreation supply, demand, mode of participation and

outdoor recreation attitudes vary in different regions of the country and that such variation is not only acceptable but desirable in a pluralistic culture. It would also be recognized that while there are good reasons to protect the historical, cultural and natural wonders of the nation with minimum regard for their geographic distribution, almost half the visitation to all federal outdoor recreation areas may be considered local use and is much more likely to be shaped by local traditions and conditions. If the Federal Government is to provide outdoor recreation services, it will have to differentiate constituents more on the basis of geographic region and sub-region than on the basis of special outdoor recreation interest groups which have a national constituency.

Providing an "equivalent" level of resources among regions would mean that dollars per capita, acres per capita, or cubic feet of public swimming water per capita would not be automatically used as assessment measures. Rather, regional and sub-regional themes for outdoor recreation development would be utilized which would differ in their assumptions not only about what should be provided, but also in regard to how it should be provided. Data from the surveys indicate considerable regional differentiation which is a product not only of differences in supply but also of differences in demographic composition, life style, barriers to participation in outdoor recreation, and so forth. In the Southeastern region of the United States, for instance, only 45% of the population has a nearby outdoor park or outdoor recreation area but 70% of those in the southern part of the west coast do. Those in the New York region are six times as likely to express dissatisfaction with nearby parks and outdoor recreation areas because of poor maintenance as those in the Dallas, Texas region. While only 7% of those in the Kansas City region say the present gas prices cause them to use public transportation more often for outdoor recreation, 20% say so in the Atlanta region. While no attempt will be made here to comprehensively define geographic

region, in regard to outdoor recreation, a region would be defined based upon (1) weather; (2) outdoor recreation resources; (3) outdoor recreation patterns and attitudes; (4) demographic factors; (5) travel variables, and related factors.

Planning for federal outdoor recreation services from a regional equivalent standpoint would require some changes in procedure at the Federal level including the following:

1. Development of citizen input at the regional and sub-regional level on a continuing and systematic basis concerning outdoor recreation. Each such process would need to include the opportunity to initiate ideas, suggestions, and criticisms rather than to merely react to a surveyor's notion of what is germane.
2. The commitment to a Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Plan which is frankly regional in nature. It should be noted that some steps are already being taken in this direction.
3. A better inventory of outdoor recreation resources at the regional level without regard to managing authority. Most of the public doesn't care who manages outdoor recreation areas if they can use them. The line between federal agencies, indeed between public, private, and the voluntary sector is not a relevant distinction to the user. Hence, information should be collected about all three.
4. Replication of the two current nationwide surveys of users and the general public so that baseline data can be established concerning national outdoor recreation <u>trends</u> and variation in trends among regions. Currently, since State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans are often not replicated and data collected for the Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Plan also aren't repeated, it is not possible to identify participation trends within a state, region or the nation.

5. A loosening up of the Land and Water Conservation Fund regulations to allow for greater regional variation in usage. Such flexibility might mean that in one region, some funds are used for indoor recreation; in another region, some funds are used for maintenance; while in another, they would be used primarily for land acquisition.
6. Development of State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans from the perspective of identified regional themes. Thus state's plans, which in many cases now serve only as an exercise to obtain eligibility for federal funds, would at least be thematically coherent and deal with specified problems of different geographical regions of the United States. State outdoor recreation planning agencies could rely on the nationwide surveys mentioned in point 4 for participation data for their region.

Ultimately, of course, a "regional equivalent" strategy, while it could be encouraged by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, would be dependent upon each of the individual federal, land-managing agencies. It would also be dependent upon closer communication between local, state and federal agencies involved.

Inherent in this strategy is the belief that outdoor recreation policy should reflect outdoor recreation behavior and outdoor recreation behavior varies regionally because of climatic, geographic, demographic, life-style and other differences. If we are to have leisure that creates and sustains culture it must have a measure of worth that cannot be nationally conferred. Once identified regionally, however, perhaps it can be assisted by the Federal Government in ways that are unique, unequal, but equivalent.

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